

Chemsol cleanup taken over by DEP

By STACEY PETERSON

PISCATAWAY — Dissatisfied with the lack of progress in cleaning up the Chemsol toxic waste site, the state Department of Environmental Protection has opted to take over the project, the Township Council learned Tuesday night.

Speaking during the council's regular meeting, Brian C. Wahler, the Democratic candidate for the Ward 2 council post, offered the fruits of his research on current conditions at the 43-acre site, located east of Hanover Street, near the Port Reading railroad line.

According to Wahler, the DEP

has grown impatient with the slow pace of the cleanup and removed Tang Realty of Scotch Plains from the project.

In a copy of a letter Wahler handed out to the council and the mayor, Dennis Hart, Acting Assistant Director of the Responsible Party Cleanup Element of the DEP, stated that the move was prompted by Tang's numerous delays, its failure to submit analytical results to the state or to notify the state before conducting field activities.

The Chemsol tract was occupied by a chemical reprocessing plant in the 1950s and 1960s. Several contaminants, including polychlorinated biphenyls and volatile organic chemicals, were found when about 7700 cubic yards of buried wastes and contaminated soil were removed from the site in 1988.

In the late 1970s, the land was rezoned from industrial to residential use and was slated to be a commercial housing development before the township banned any kind of development on the land until the DEP gave it a clean bill of health.

In 1980 it was deemed hazardous and Tang Realty was ordered to clean up the property. During this winter's master plan revision hearings, the Planning

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Board agreed to continue the ban. A member of the League of Women Voters, which has "adopted" Chemsol as a long-term project, stated at the time that the LWV was concerned about the residential zoning.

Wahler suggested Tuesday night that the council draft a resolution stating the township's stance on Tang's failure to restore the land.

Reading from a prepared statement, Wahler said he would like to see the resolution include a statement of the township's concerns for the health and safety of its residents and a request that the site be cleaned up quickly.

He added that he would also like the township to show support

for the decision to remove Tang, adding that he would like to see a request for the state and federal governments to initiate any legal action that would force Tang to finance cleanup costs.

Wahler said he would like to see the township seek triple damages and criminal charges against the company and its principals if necessary.

He said that the DEP is expected to announce another decision regarding the case next week.

He also said that Tang is attempting to fight the takeover.

"This is no surprise to me," said Ward 4 Councilman Jim Stewart. "I've personally been very unhappy about this for a long time along with my predecessors." Council President Camille Ferricola said the council would work on a resolution for adoption at the next regular meeting.

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